



KIM NEWMAN (ED.)

SCIENCE FICTION/HORROR: A SIGHT AND SOUND READER

London, BFI Publishing, 2002.

REVIEWED BY TAMA LEAVER.

Kim Newman's edited collection *Science Fiction/Horror* is the fourth reader from the British Film Institute which brings together articles and reviews around a common theme (or, in this case, common themes) which have appeared in *Sight and Sound* over the past twelve years. Previous efforts have examined *Action/Spectacle Cinema* (edited by José Arroya), *American Independent Cinema* (edited by Jim Hillier) and *Film/Literature Heritage* (edited by Ginette Vincendeau). As Newman admits in his introduction, there is considerable common ground between this collection and past readers. Partially as a result of this, there is the occasional sense that *Science Fiction/Horror* was conceived as a means to publish material that did not make it into past readers, rather than the reader being driven by a strong genre-based analysis. Indeed, those reading to understand the slash in *Science Fiction/Horror*—seeking to explore the boundaries and collisions between the two genres—may wonder by the end of the collection why Newman did not simply opt for an ampersand. The collection holds a number of fine articles on both horror and science fiction, but few which put effort into discussing the way film genres actually function, and fewer which take the intersections between the two genres as central. Those criticisms aside, a brief overview of the section breakdown in Newman's collection illuminates the value of *Science Fiction/Horror*.

The first section, 'Themes', deals with broad tropes, images and concerns which are, in some way, common to the genres in question. Articles range from J. Hoberman and Howard Waldrop examining (quite differently) the Cold War nuclear fears underlying a considerable number of 1950s and 1960s science fiction films, through to more specific articles, such as Amy Taubin's focus on vampire mythology as mediated by 1990s horror films, and Linda Ruth Williams' fascinating look at

the recurrence of imagery of the gouged eye. The articles differ in tone somewhat, shifting from pseudo-academic to journalistic in style, which can be a little disconcerting when reading a full section. However, for the most part each article does have something interesting to say, and since *Sight and Sound* has only existed in its current form for twelve years, by and large the articles are all usefully focused on contemporary cinema.

Section two is even more broadly labeled 'Films'. Newman points out that, although genre films are often analysed in groups there are occasional 'tentpoles—films which stand out in the crowd' and the section seeks to examine a few of these tentpoles (p.45). Predictably enough, the first article by Phillip Stick looks at *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982), although the article is located around the re-release of the 1993 director's cut. On the other side of the slash, the horror films are well represented with a look at, among others, Roman Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), and Linda Williams' article on the relationship between psychoanalytic and horror-as-fear readings of Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) is particularly insightful. Other articles are critically powerful as well, but oddly positioned. Amy Taubin's excellent 'So Good It Hurts' looks at *Fight Club* (David Fincher, 1999) but has little to say about science fiction or horror and the only connection appears to be that excessive violence somehow is enough to position the film as horror. Moreover, a few reviews, such as that of *Red Planet* (Antony Hoffman, 2000), seem out of place in a chapter otherwise focusing on what are supposedly 'tentpoles' or, at the very least, films well thought of by critics.

Section three, 'People and Stories', is the last broad section and collects articles which either look at directors, characters or other story-based ideas. Thomas Elsaesser's piece examines ongoing threads of vampirism in his wonderfully titled 'Six Degrees of Nosferatu'. Ridley Scott is examined in the wake of *Hannibal* (2001), while Hannibal Lector is examined in the film's review. Tim Burton's career is given an overview by Andrew O'Hehir, who laments the paltry remake of *Planet of the Apes* (2001). And even Godzilla gets a decent number of pages focusing on na-

tional origins and the efforts of the recent remake to shift any critique of nuclear testing onto the French. As these examples testify, Newman's collection keeps the eclectic nature of *Sight and Sound* alive and well, bringing together some interesting reading which is, loosely, anchored around two genres (although readers would still be wondering how those genres intersect).

The final three sections of *Science Fiction/Horror* are 'case studies' focusing on 'Teenage Postmodern Horror', 'Gameworlds and Rubber Reality' and 'Stanley Kubrick'. The first case study, focusing on the resurgence of the teenage-aimed horror-slasher flicks, is probably the most tightly held together segment of the collection, which is no real surprise given that ten of the thirteen film reviews in this section were written by Kim Newman himself, thus reproducing the ongoing thematic that his reviews were arguing from month to month in *Sight and Sound*. The second case study, however, is somewhat less coherent. While 'Gameworlds and Rubber Realities' enmeshes some films in an understandable way, such as *Strange Days* (Kathryn Bigelow, 1995), *Dark City* (Alex Proyas, 1998) and *eXistenZ*, (David Cronenberg, 1999) at the other extreme films such as *Groundhog Day* (Harold Ramis, 1993), *Edtv* (Ron Howard, 1999) and *Timecode* (Mike Figgis, 2000) seem like random inclusions rather than falling under some sort of thematic umbrella. I suspect Newman is making a common postmodern assumption that anything which looks self-reflexively at technology or uses technology creatively is somehow science fiction. The chosen films, however, go a long way in arguing for a more explicit delineation of their either horrific or science fictional nature and tend to beg for other labels such as 'Magic Realism' or 'Fantasy' or, for *Timecode*, 'experimental'. The final case study—of Stanley Kubrick—thus comes as a welcome relief, with articles focusing mainly on *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) and *The Shining* (1980), and even making tentative connections between the two genre classics.

Given the eclectic range and critical paucity in terms of engaging with genre intersections despite the provocative slash in the title, what use is *Science Fiction/Horror*? To someone who has only

picked up the occasional copy of *Sight and Sound* in the last decade, this collection brings together an excellent range of reading material lighter than academic but more thoughtful than popular journalism (with one or two exceptions). To people focused on exploring film genres, the collection is still of value as long as the reader keeps in mind that while horror and science fiction are both examined, they make awkward bedfellows. That said, I suspect most readers would enjoy parts of the collection; my own favourite was Phillip Strick's 'Riddle of the Sands' which examines the (ongoing) adaptations of Frank Herbert's science fiction epic *Dune*, and is particularly insightful, examining both the often ignored David Lynch version and the recent Science Fiction Channel mini-series.

Tama Leaver is currently researching a Ph.D. in English, Communication and Cultural Studies at the University of Western Australia entitled 'Artificialities: From Artificial Intelligence to Artificial People—Representations and Constructions of Identity and Embodiment in Contemporary Speculative Texts'. When not pondering overly long titles, his research interests include cybercultures, science fiction, new media and contemporary cinema.

VICKY LEBEAU

PSYCHOANALYSIS AND CINEMA: THE PLAY OF SHADOWS

Wallflower Publishing, London, 2001.

SARAH STREET

COSTUME AND CINEMA: DRESS CODES IN POPULAR FILM

Wallflower Publishing, London, 2001.

JOHN GIBBS

MISE EN SCÈNE: FILM STYLE AND INTERPRETATION

Wallflower Publishing, London, 2002.

REVIEWED BY RUSSELL KEALEY

The first of this recent batch in Wallflower Press' *Short Cuts* series is a disappointment. Given that the aim of the series is to serve as 'introductory texts ... for students and enthusiasts of cinema and popular culture', Vicky Lebeau concentrates far too much on the development of psychoanalysis itself, and far too little on the intersection between psychoanalysis and cinema. There are certainly some worthwhile points made but, on balance, her book does not meet the standard of other titles in the series (eleven have been published so far).

Lebeau briefly covers the main concepts incorporated in psychoanalytic film theory—cinema as spectacle, voyeurism, fetishism, the *doppelgänger*, etc.—but does not spend sufficient space examining how these concepts apply to film. As a supposed introductory text she would have served her audience much better by including more direct examples from specific films. The index shows that direct reference is made to only eight films and most of these are passing references rather than detailed discussions.

Sarah Street's *Costume and Cinema* is a complete contrast. Street has written an excellent introduction to the whole area of costume design and its relationship to the representation of characters. She includes discussion of detailed examples from *A Night To Remember*, (Roy Baker, 1958) and *Titanic* (James Cameron, 1997), *The Talented Mr Ripley* (Anthony Minghella, 1999) and its earlier incarnation *Plein Soleil* (René Clément, 1960), *Desperately Seeking Susan* (Susan Seidelman, 1985), *Wonderland* (Michael Winterbottom, 1999) and *The Matrix* (Wachowski Bros., 1999).

Street begins with an overview of various approaches to both fashion in general and cinema costume design in particular. She notes that film costumes are often adapted; 'they conform to notions of realism but also need to conform to notions of cinematic spectacle'. That is, despite extensive research that costume designers may undertake, they rarely produce costumes that are replicas of



